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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: ZLSD RE-ELECTS PAHOR AND CHANGES ITS NAME

1. (U) SUMMARY: On Saturday, April 2, 2005, the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD) held its Party Congress and elected its leadership for the next four years. Members of the Youth Wing won important positions, which will likely move the party away from the center and more to the left. The party members also strongly endorsed party President Borut Pahor's proposal to change the name of the party to the Social Democrats (SD). END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Current ZLSD (now SD) president Borut Pahor's rival for the party presidency was Aljus Pertinac, a former president of the party's Youth Wing. Not unexpectedly, members of the Congress expressed strong support for Pahor, voting for him 270-119.

3. (U) Despite Pertinac's defeat, the Youth Wing successfully broke through at the Congress and secured several important positions, including Secretary General. Youth Wing candidate Uros Jausovec defeated Stasa Baloh Plahutnik, former State Secretary at the Ministry of Labor, 256 votes to 139.

4. (U) Both Youth Wing candidates for vice-president, Luka Juri and Igor Luksic, made it into the second round elections with the latter winning the position with 241 votes. The second vice-president is Ms. Andreja Rihter, former Minister of Culture, who secured 225 votes. Former Minister of Labor, Vlado Dimovski, was elected president of the party conference.

5. (U) The Congress also voted convincingly on Pahor's proposal to change the party name from the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD) to Social Democrats (SD). In addition to internal elections, the Congress also formed two new bodies: The Council of the President of the Party, similar to a shadow government, and the Strategic-Program Council, which will be in charge of preparation of the party's new strategic program.

COMMENT

6. (SBU) Changing the name of the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD) to simply Social Democrats (SD) symbolizes Pahor's consolidation of his party's identity as 'the' social democratic party in Slovenia. Several years ago, when PM Jansa's Slovene Democratic Party (SDS) was the Social Democratic Party of Slovenia (also SDS), Pahor managed to beat out Jansa's bid and gain membership for the ZLSD in the world organization of social democratic parties. While a disappointment, this turn of events probably allowed Jansa the leeway he needed to officially move his party to the center-right and to change its name.

7. (SBU) The outcome of the Social Democrats' Party Congress demonstrates a desire to remain firmly on the left of the spectrum. The strong Youth Wing showing will force Pahor to move a bit further left and away from the center, where he has recently anchored himself. Pahor has long battled the entrenched former Communist apparatchiks that filled leadership roles in the past. Now, he will have to manage youthful influences in order to fully develop his plans to make the party into a more traditionally European social democratic party. His ultimate goal is to assume leadership of the political left in Slovenia, a position currently held by the recently ousted prime minister, Anton Rop and the Liberal Democracy (LDS) party.

8. (SBU) Pahor's personal goals also likely involve a bid for the Presidency of the Republic in 2007. He has lately been following the lead of current President Janez Drnovsek, who in the run-up to his own presidential bid, became a less combative, more conciliatory political figure. Pahor has the name and face recognition, solid political credentials and an even temperament that appeals to the Slovene voter. He also has the ability to cooperate with both the left and the right as demonstrated by his party's inclusion in the last government coalition, and exploration of possibly joining the current coalition last fall.

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